

SPIRITUAL RELIGION

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A SERMON
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“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.”
John 6:63

TO a casual reader, it looks as if the meaning of this passage lay upon the very surface, but he who has studied the chapter carefully has discovered that it is a sentence replete with many difficulties as to the exact interpretation of it. I shall not, however, waste your time by entering into any critical discussion of it, but shall only try to give you simply what I believe to be the mind of the Spirit, as uttered by the lips of Jesus in this passage, and after I have done that, I shall then revert to what I shall call the meaning which any person would give to it who is not a diligent and careful student of Scripture. That meaning being true, although not the special truth taught in this passage, I shall briefly enlarge upon it.

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.” I suppose there is not a man in the world that could form any intelligent idea of what a spirit is. It is very easy for persons to define a spirit by saying what it is not, but I query whether there is, or ever could be, any man who could form any idea of what it is.

We sometimes talk about seeing a spirit, ignorant persons in ages gone by, and some living now in benighted villages, talk about seeing spirits by night. They must know that such talk is a contradiction. Matter can be seen, but a spirit, if it clothed itself in any light substance, could not even then be seen, it would only be the substance that would be visible. The spirit itself is a thing which can neither be tasted, handled, seen, nor discerned in any way whatever by our senses, for if it could thus be perceived, there would then be proof positive that it was not a spirit at all, but that it belonged to the material realm.

We divide all things into matter and spirit, and whatsoever can be recognized by the senses, in any way is matter, depend on it. A spirit is itself a thing too subtle to be either seen or in any other way perceived by the senses, so I repeat what I said just now, that I suppose there is no man living, and that there never will be any man in this mortal state, who will be able to accurately define a spirit so as to say what it is, though he may be able to say what it is not.

Now, there is a region where there are spirits dwelling without any bodies being connected with them. It is certain that, in the world to come, in that state which now intervenes between the death of the saints and the day of the resurrection, they are dwelling before the throne of God in a disembodied state—pure spirits, without any corporeal form whatever. It is quite certain that the saints before the throne have no semblance of bodily shape whatever. They are pure spirits, beings whose substance we cannot imagine, purely immaterial, as they are also immaculate.

But on earth, you can find no such thing as a pure spirit. We are all spirits in bodies, and somehow, from the fact that wherever we find souls and spirits, they are always found in bodies, we are very apt to confound bodies and spirits together. But let us always understand that bodies and spirits are distinct things, and though it has pleased God, in this world, never to make a spirit without making a house for it to dwell in, called the body, yet the body is not the spirit. “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.”

You will easily perceive the truth of this passage if you will recollect that, in man's body, no one can tell where the life is situated. In vain the surgeon lays the body on the table, and dissects it, he will find

life neither in the brain nor in the heart, he may cut the body in pieces as he pleases, but he will not find anything that he can lay hold upon tangibly and really, and say, "That is life." He can see all the effects and evidences of life, he can watch the various parts of the body moving, he can behold all the appearances of life which are caused by a supernatural something, but life he cannot see.

That is altogether beyond his ken, and after all his searching, he must lay down his scalpel and say at once, "There now, the task is all over, there is a spirit that quickeneth this body, but in my search after life this flesh profiteth me nothing. I might as well search for a soul within a stone, or within one of the pillars that support this house, as search for a soul within mere flesh and blood if I look for something which I can see, which I can lay hold of, or which, by either taste, sight, smelling, or any other sense, I can distinguish and can designate as being a spirit."

So, brethren, this illustration just brings me to the truth that is taught in our text. We are here assembled at this moment, spirits, souls. Here we are also, bodies, but these bodies are not ourselves, they are the houses in which we live. I question whether there is any man who can define what he is himself, the most that any man can say is, "I am, I know I have an existence, but what kind of thing my spirit is, I do not know, I cannot tell, I have no knowledge of what it is. I feel it, I know it moves my body, I feel its outward manifestations, I am certain of my existence, but what I am, I know not, God alone can say."

"I AM THAT I AM," is comprehensible only to God Himself, but man is a being incomprehensible to himself, and though the Lord may allow him to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am," he cannot tell what he really is, he cannot fully comprehend his own existence.

Understand then, that as in our being there is a mystery in our flesh, so religion, the true religion of the blessed God, in order to be made like unto us, and to be a something suitable to us, must be a religion of spirit, but because we also have a body, it must have a body in which to clothe itself. I want, if I can, to make this plain to you, and if you do not understand it now, I hope you will before I have done.

We are spirits in bodies. Well then, in order to meet our cases, the great work of God in us must be a spiritual thing, but in order that I may be able to talk about it to you, and that you may be able to hear it with your ears, that spiritual thing must be encased in a body, or else, if it were a purely spiritual thing, I could not explain it to you, any more than I could explain to you about a spirit, if there were no body in which a spirit could be found, and no body in which I could be able to live to talk about it.

I want to show you this truth very clearly, because there are some persons who are so busy about that which concerns merely the body of religion that they altogether forget that religion has also a spirit. I believe that what our Lord Jesus meant in this passage was, "The mere embodiment of religion profiteth nothing, it is the spirit that quickeneth."

Just as, to use my figure over again, in order to perform an act, the mere flesh and blood and arms and legs profit nothing, it is the spirit that quickens all the bones, and makes the nerves act as they ought to do, and the sinews work as they should, so religion has its outward form, it has its ceremonies, it has its external and visible developments—its body—but the mere outward body of religion is of no use whatever, unless the inward and invisible spirit quickens it.

I. To begin then, I WILL FIRST SHOW YOU THIS TRUTH AS OUR SAVIOR, I THINK, MEANT IT WHEN HE FIRST OF ALL STATED IT.

There were some people in our Savior's day, who admired Christ merely as a man, and they thought there was some marvelous efficacy in His flesh and blood. To them He said, using almost the very words of our text, "Even My flesh will profit you nothing; it is the spirit that quickens." I must state this truth very cautiously, yet very plainly.

When our Savior was upon this earth, there were some, I repeat, who admired His person. You remember how our Savior rebuked the woman who said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which gave thee suck." He would not have people simply admire His flesh, and think so

much of His mere humanity, so He said to her, “Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.”

There were some other people, who wanted to take the Lord Jesus, and make Him a king, but in effect, He said to them, “My flesh, even if you exalt it to a throne, will profit you nothing. I did not come here that you might bow down and venerate My mere flesh, that you might think the mere admiration of My mortal frame is vital religion. It is the spirit, the Gospel that I came to preach, that will benefit you. It is not these outward appearances, it is My thoughts, and words, and acts, which are to bless you.”

Hear what the Savior says in the next sentence, “It is not your admiration of My flesh that is of any use to you, for My flesh profits nothing, it is the spirit that quickens, and if you want to know what is the spirit of My incarnation, I tell you that the words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life. It is not your venerating My flesh and blood, it is your reception of My doctrines that will be the heart and soul of the religion that I desire you to possess.”

Our Savior was, however, led to make these remarks from the fact that the ignorant Jews, when Jesus talked about eating His flesh, and drinking His blood, really thought that He meant that they were to turn cannibals, and eat Him up. You may well smile at so ridiculous an idea, yet you know that the idea is still prevalent in the Church of Rome.

The Romish priest solemnly assures us that the people who eat the bread and drink the wine, or the stuff he calls bread and wine, do actually act the part of cannibals, and eat the body of Christ, and drink His blood. You say to him, “You mean, my dear sir, that they do it in a figure, spiritually.” “No,” he says, “I do not, I mean to say that, after I have pronounced certain words over that bread, it becomes Christ’s flesh, and after I have said a certain prayer over that wine, it becomes His actual blood.”

“Well,” we reply to him, “it is very singular, and you certainly cannot expect us to believe you, while God allows our heads to be occupied by brains, but even if we do believe you, my dear sir, we refer you to this passage, which says, ‘It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.’ You tell the people that they do actually and really receive the body and blood of Christ.

Suppose they do, it is no earthly use to them, and even if they could carnally bite the flesh with their teeth, and drink the blood down their throats, it would be of no more use to them than the eating of the flesh and blood of any other man. It could be of no service whatever to them, for Christ Himself denounces the error of transubstantiation, and declares that even His flesh profiteth nothing. It is only the spirit, the spiritual receiving of that flesh and blood, that can be of any avail whatsoever.”

While I am referring to this point, allow me to say just a few more words upon it, for Popery prevails in this day, and the doctrine that the bread and wine are turned into the body and blood of Christ is the bulwark of Popery. Dr. Carson, of Coleraine, son of Dr. Carson, the eminent Baptist, has settled off Dr. Cahill in a remarkable way. He has challenged Dr. Cahill to prove that he can turn the bread and wine used in the sacrament into Christ’s body and blood. He offers to give Dr. Cahill a hundred pounds if he will let him make a wafer for him, and if Dr. Cahill will then put it on his own tongue, and swallow it in Mr. Carson’s presence, “if the Doctor is not dead in an hour,” says Dr. Carson, “I’ll give him a hundred pounds.”

“No,” says someone, “that is not fair.” “Oh! but if he can turn it into the body and blood of Christ, it cannot hurt him, whatever it may contain.” “But would you make it of poison, then?” “Yes, the deadliest I could find.” “Would you give him poison?” “I should not give it to him, he would swallow it himself, he would do it of his own voluntary choice.” Of course, Dr. Cahill will not submit to that test, he knows that he cannot turn the wafer and the wine into the body and blood of Christ, if he could, Dr. Carson says it would not hurt him, for the body and blood of Christ would poison no one.

But some wise Romanist says, “That is not a fair test, Dr. Cahill does not pretend to turn poison into the body and blood of Christ, it is only pure bread and wine that can thus be manipulated.” “Very well,” says Dr. Carson, “I’ll try him another way. I will let him choose a youth from seven or eight Catholic

boys, he shall take a quart of wine, and turn this wine in his own peculiar way into the blood of Christ. The boy shall drink the quart of wine, and if he is not drunk in six hours, I will pay the hundred pounds.”

“Now,” says Dr. Carson, “if that liquid is really the blood of Christ, it will not make him drunk, he might drink a hogshead of it, and it would not make him intoxicated.” But Dr. Cahill dares not come to such a trial as that, for it would very soon be found that the so-called “consecrated” wine would make the boy intoxicated as quickly as any other wine would, therefore, it could not have been turned, even by the great Doctor himself, into the blood of Christ.

The fact is, the lie is so palpable, the delusion is so absurd, that any child, of a reasonable age, would as soon think of believing the cock and bull story which we used to read in our childish days, about what the bull said, and what the cock said, to be actual truth, as to imagine it to be a literal fact that any priest, or any man in the world, could ever turn bread and wine into flesh and blood.

But even if they could, hear again the words of our text, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.” So then, after all, the Roman Catholic sacrament, if it is actually a cannibal’s feast upon the body and blood of Christ, is of no earthly use, but that divinely appointed ordinance wherein we do spiritually receive the flesh and blood of Jesus, and in a spiritual way hold communion with Him, is that alone which quickens.

This brings me to the truth that I want you, dear friends, especially to understand. As Christ Jesus in His flesh was the embodiment of His own doctrine, and yet not His flesh, but the spirit of His doctrine quickens souls, so the outward forms and ceremonies, which Christ has made to be the body to contain the spirit of His truth, are of no earthly use at all unless the Spirit of God is in them.

Take for instance, the ordinance of believers’ baptism, there are the pool and the water, that pool and that water are, so to speak, the flesh and blood of dedication, the right observance of that holy ordinance signifies that we do solemnly devote ourselves to the Lord Jesus. Suppose, however, our hearts are in a wrong condition, or that we are not converted persons—suppose there is no influence of the Spirit resting upon us during the act of baptism, then the act of baptism is like the flesh apart from the spirit, it is a dead thing, it profits nothing, because it is without the soul.

We come, the next Sabbath, to the Lord’s table, there is the bread broken by God’s servant, there is the wine reverently handed round by the deacons of the church, and it is sipped by the communicants, but mark you, however devoutly the whole service is performed, unless the Spirit of the living God breathes through the divine ordinance, “the flesh”—that is, the mere embodiment of communion—will profit you nothing. You might sit at a thousand communion tables, and you might be baptized in a myriad pools, but all this would not avail one jot or tittle for your salvation, unless you had the Spirit of God to quicken you.

Nay, to go further, it is not these two outward ordinances only that need the Spirit in them, it is so in everything else. You have sometimes read, dear friends, of some eminent Christians who grew to have much fellowship with Christ by prayer. Perhaps you imbibed the idea that, if you were to go home, and spend as many hours in your closet as they did, you would get as much profit by it, and not thinking about the Holy Spirit, you simply devote yourself to private prayer as you might to any manual exercise, with a hope of profiting by the exercise alone.

I tell you, you might be on your knees till your knees were worn bare, and you might be in your closet till the steam of your devotion ran down the walls, but unless the Spirit of the Lord was in that closet with you, the mere fleshly exercise of praying would no more avail and profit you than if you had been chanting songs to the moon, or standing in the street to sell your goods.

Another hears that a certain person has been very much blessed by reading a text of Scripture. “Oh!” he says, “has that text been blessed to such a one? Then I’ll go and read the same passage too.” You think that, if you do the same as he does, you will be equally blessed, and you are marvelously surprised that when you read the passage, it does you no good. It made his spirit leap for joy, it filled his soul with the wine of the kingdom, but to you it is like a dry well, or an empty bottle. Why is this? The mere letter,

in which the promise is revealed, profits you nothing, it is the spirit of the promise, it is the life of the Holy Spirit running through the veins of the promise that alone can profit you.

You hear that another man meditates on God's law day and night, and becomes like a tree planted by the rivers of water. You say, "I will take care that every morning, I will read a chapter out of the Scriptures, and that every night, I will read two chapters." There are certain people who think that, if they read a good passage out of the Bible, they have done a great deal. In that kind of spirit, they might just as well read a portion out of Hudibras, for they just read it straight through, without thinking or understanding it.

Many of our ministers think that in the public service, they must read a certain quantity of Scriptures, and they take, perhaps, three long chapters out of Ezekiel, and not a soul in the congregation knows the meaning of what they are reading. If they were to read a Dutch sermon in an English chapel, it would do the hearers just about as much good, for no one understands what they read. Instead of reading, as Ezra did, and expounding the meaning to the people, they must go on over hedge and ditch—one continual steeple chase! Instead of stopping to crack the shells, and give the kernels of truth to the people, they read right on, without attempting to give any explanation of the passage.

To such persons, we would simply say, "Your Bible reading is but the flesh, it is of no use to you, 'it is the spirit that quickeneth,' the mere flesh, the outward fashion and form of Bible reading will not profit anybody. One sentence of the Bible prayed over, and bedewed with the Spirit, and made alive, though it be only a short sentence of six words, will profit you more than a hundred chapters without the Spirit, because they are 'flesh'—dead, but the one verse with the Spirit is the thing that quickeneth."

I do not know whether I have as yet brought out the full meaning of the text, but I want to let everyone understand that it is not the mere outward embodiment of our religion that saves the soul, and that profits us, it is the inner spirit of the thing that does us good. Mark, I would not find fault with any of these forms, any more than I would find fault with our bodies because they are not spirits, our bodies are good things for our spirits to live in, and the forms of religion are good things for the spirit of religion to live in, but the form without the spirit, though it be the most decorous, and apparently the most devout that can be presented to God, can be of no use for our soul's eternal profit and ultimate salvation. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

Now, my dear friend, Mr. So-and-so, if you will just take out your pencil, and cast up your accounts for all the years of your life, the sum of them all will come to very little, if what I say be true. "I think" you say, "I am a tolerably good sort of man, I have a few faults, but just look at what I have done. I have been to chapel twice every Sunday almost since I was a boy—I don't know that I missed once, except when I was ill, that has been very good of me, and no mistake. I always read the Bible every morning, I always have family prayer; that is very good of me, another item to be reckoned to my account. I say my prayers when I go to bed at night, and when I get up in the morning, I very frequently go to prayer meetings, I don't think anyone can reasonably find fault with me, really, I think I do everything to make me a truly religious man."

Ah! and did you put at the end of it, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, unjust, extortioners," and so on, or even like that poor fellow, a Sabbath breaker, whom you saw going the opposite way as you were coming to your usual place of worship? It is a pity you didn't finish it up in that fashion, but if you did not in words, you finished it up so in your heart.

But I pray God to show you that all these beautiful things of yours are good for nothing. There are your chapel goings—all flesh, there are your Bible readings—all flesh, there are your family prayers—all flesh, there are your good works and excellences—all flesh. You have never received the Spirit of the living God, you dare not say that you have. Well then, all these things will profit you nothing whatsoever.

"It is the spirit that quickeneth," you know, my dear sir—and let me speak very pointedly—you know that you never enter into the spirit of the things of which you have been speaking. Though you go to your church or chapel regularly, yet you know that you might very often just as well be at home, for

when the worshippers sing, you do not sing with all your heart, and when the minister preaches, it is seldom there is much that touches you, unless it is what you call “a good intellectual discourse,” which happens to please you, and you believe it just because it meets with your views. You know that, into the inward soul, and marrow, and bowels of devotion, you have never yet learned to penetrate. Your devotion is like a certain ox, which was slain as a sacrifice in the time of siege in Rome, and was said to forecast evil because, when the augur slew it, he declared that he could not find a heart anywhere. He looked through all the entrails, but no heart could he discover, and hence, the Romans declared that their city must be destroyed. It was an omen of ill fortune they said, when the sacrifice had no heart in it.

It is just the same with you. You have done all these things, and there has been as much reality in what you have done as there was devotion in the poor Kalmuck’s windmill, when he tied a prayer to it, and put it up in the garden, and every time it blew round, he counted that was just one more prayer. There was as much heart in your prayer as there was in his windmill, that is to say, none at all. Go on no longer with this useless round of performances, I implore you. I would not have you give up the performances, but seek the spirit that can make them true and acceptable in God’s sight. Stop awhile, and ask God to give you that inward spirit that quickeneth, for that is what is needed, “the flesh profiteth nothing.”

But I must speak also to you, who are the children of God, and I must ask you—How often do you forget this all-important truth? I know it is not likely that I would leave my chamber any morning without prayer, but oh, brethren, I have often left it without having the spirit of prayer! I should not like to pass a day without reading the Scriptures, but I am afraid it is very often the mere “flesh” of formal reading, and not the spirit breathing in the Word. And how often is our conscience satisfied with the mere form without the spirit! Now, if we were what we ought to be, we should never be content with the form, unless we could also see the spirit in it.

Mother, would you be content to have at home a child who was dead? Suppose someone should say to you, “Why, this child is just as good a child as ever it was! Look at it! It has not lost a leg, or an arm, or any part of its body!” “Ah, but,” you would say, “It is dead.” “Oh!” says one, “there is no great difference, it looks as beautiful now as ever it did.” “Ah!” says the poor mother, “but there is a vast deal of difference between what it was when it was alive, and what it is now it is dead.”

Just transfer that idea to your poor dead prayers, your poor dead Bible readings, and your poor dead sacraments, your poor dead goings to chapel, and all that! Ah! how many of our sacrifices are just poor dead things, when we bring them to the Lord! They have died in the night, and then we come and offer them before God!

How frequently do we satisfy our conscience with having “the flesh”—the embodiment of the sacrifice, and yet, all the while, we forget the spirit! But let us remember that God only looks for the life. He does not trouble about the body, and we ought, in all we do for him, to take care, first of all, that the spirit is there, and then we may rest quite sure that the flesh and blood of the devotion will take care of themselves.

II. This, I believe, is the true meaning of the passage. But the common rendering of it, if anyone reads it without noticing the context, would be, “Why, that means, ‘It is the spirit that quickeneth,’ that is to say, ‘IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT QUICKENETH; THE FLESH PROFITETH NOTHING.’”

Our friend will excuse me when I say that it cannot mean that, you notice that the “s” in the word “spirit” in the text has not a capital letter. If it meant the Holy Spirit, it would be so marked, to separate it from the spirit to which I have just referred—the inward spirit, the life of a thing. This word “spirit” here does not mean the Holy Spirit, still, almost every ordinary reader would make that mistake, and say, “It is the Holy spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.”

Well, it is a mistake that will not do him any hurt, because if it does not say so here, it does say so somewhere else, and if it is not true in this one particular text, it is true all over the Bible, and it is true in a Christian’s experience, so that a man may make a great many worse mistakes than that. Well then, let

us for once make that mistake, and then let us get the truth out of it, “It is the Holy Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing”—

*“Can aught beneath a power divine
The stubborn will subdue?
'Tis Thine, Eternal Spirit, Thine
To form the heart anew.*

*'Tis Thine the passions to recall,
And upwards bid them rise;
And make the scales of error fall
From reason's darkened eyes.*

*To chase the shades of death away,
And bid the sinner live;
A beam of heaven, a vital ray,
'Tis Thine alone to give.”*

How often have I thought, when I have been preaching, “There is a young woman in the gallery, and down there in that area is a young man, how interested they look during the sermon!” I have met with them, I have admired their characters, they have had an amiable carriage and deportment, there has been much in them that everybody would tell others to imitate and emulate. I have said, “Ah! I shall soon have them added to the church, there is so much that is good about them, it will be such an easy transition for them, they are so moral and so excellent, it will be very easy for them surely to take a step into the kingdom of heaven.”

I don't say that I have said so much as that in words to my heart, but that has been about what I have thought. Well, there has been a very different sort of fellow, a queer looking object certainly, who came running into the chapel one Thursday evening towards the end of the service, not even washed, nor in any way prepared for divine worship, he only just came to hear something that would make him laugh, as he thought. I did not expect to have him converted, but the next time I sat to see inquirers, in he came—cleaned and brushed up—but I recognized him, for all that, and I said to him, “Didn't you come into the chapel one Thursday night, after you had been hammering and tinkering away somewhere? I thought you looked a strange customer, certainly.” “Yes,” he said, “and the Lord met with me that night.”

Now, I sat many and many a time to see inquirers, but I did not see the young man or the young woman come. Why was this? The Lord meant to teach His servant that “the flesh profiteth nothing.” That man seemed to me far from God, but that young man and that young woman seemed very near. But the Lord said to me, “I will just let you learn that all their morality and all their goodness did not put them near the kingdom of heaven, or help towards their salvation. I could save one as well as the other, and if I chose to show My sovereignty, I might even let publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of heaven before those who, becoming proud of their morality, would not stoop before Me.”

Have you not sometimes, met with a person of such a peculiar character that you have said, “Is it not a pity someone cannot talk with that man?” I often have notes of this sort. A father writes to me, “I wish you could get hold of my son, he is a very interesting young man, if you were to put the truth before him to suit his turn of mind, he would be sure to lay hold of it, for if you knew how he was mentally constituted, you would say at once there was a peculiar adaptation in his mind for the reception of the Gospel.” Well, I have been told that a dozen times, but I never found it true even once. “The flesh profiteth nothing.”

No peculiar adaptation of mind is any more susceptible of Gospel influences than another. Dead sinners are all dead, and all dead alike. Some may be black, and some may be white, some may be well

washed and dressed, and some may have all the mire and filth of sensuality about them, but they are all dead alike, and when converting grace comes to deal with them, it finds as much for its exercise in the one case as in the other, it finds as much to help it in the one heart as in the other—that is to say, it finds nothing to help it at all. It brings all that is helpful within itself, it kindles its own fire with its own torch, it blows the fire with its own breath, and asks for nothing in the sinner, be he who he may.

Then, again, we have sometimes said, “If such and such a man were converted, dear me, what a shining Christian he would make! He is a man of brilliant talents, of great intellectual power, and of extensive fortune. Oh, if he were but converted, what a jubilee it would be to the church of God! How much he would do for Christ!” Well, do you know, I have always found out that these fine people, who, when they were converted, were to be something extraordinary, if they have been converted, and we have got them, have not turned out to be quite so great after all!

I knew a minister once, who with great joy and gladness, baptized a man. It was on a New Year’s day, and I remember with what self-congratulation he said, “The Lord has sent me one of the best New Year’s gifts I ever had,” and he looked upon that man, and said, “Ah! this *is* a brother, he is a great gain to the church, he is a man of such active spirit, of such an excellent turn of mind, and he is everything that could be desired.”

Well, I have just happened to live long enough to see that man rend the church in sunder, and drive the minister out of his pulpit, and he is alive still, a thorn in the side of that church, and a huge prickly bramble that they would be glad enough to eradicate, but they have scarcely power enough to do that. No, the Lord will show us that “the flesh profiteth nothing.” “You may have him,” says the Lord, “if he is such a fine fellow, take him, you will find he will not be much good to you after all. I will let you know that ‘the flesh profiteth nothing,’ ‘it is the spirit’ alone ‘that quickens.’”

On the other hand, we have seen some come whose “flesh” could not help them. They were the poor, the mean, the illiterate, the despised, and we have seen the grace of God blaze up in their hearts to an intense degree of fervor, and we have seen them stand confident and strong, notwithstanding the nothingness of the flesh, and then we have said, “Verily, O God, it is marvelous how, when the flesh is weak, thy grace is strong,” and we have heard an answer from “the excellent glory,” which said, “Ah! the flesh profiteth nothing, it is the spirit that quickeneth.”

Now, I do not believe that there is any form of our flesh, nor any act of our flesh, nor anything that our flesh can do, or attempt to do, or think of, or suggest, that can in any way assist in the great spiritual work of our salvation. It is the Spirit alone that quickeneth, and you will find till you die, that “the flesh profiteth nothing,” and profits no one except the devil, and it often profits him, but in God’s ways, and in God’s holy Gospel, you will always find the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. You will have to feel this truth that the flesh at its best estate profiteth nothing. “It is the spirit that quickeneth.”

Now, my brother, or my sister, in conclusion, I will ask you this question—Have you received the influences of the Holy Spirit? and have those influences led you to worship God, who is a Spirit, “in spirit and in truth”? For, if not, though some may put you in the cradle of ceremonies, and rock you to sleep, I will not be one of them.

Although men may tell you you are right enough because you are outwardly so religious, because you are no Sabbath breaker, no swearer, no drunkard, I warn you that unless you are born again from above, you cannot see the kingdom of God, and when drunkards, and harlots, and all manner of ungodly persons, shall be driven from the presence of God, you also shall share their fate, for you are dead in trespasses and sins, even as they are.

If you would ever enter heaven, you must be quickened by the Holy Spirit. No more shall I say, but earnestly entreat the Spirit of the blessed God to impress upon your hearts this solemn thought, and lead you to renounce the works of the flesh, and put your trust in Him “who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe.” May the Lord’s mercy rest upon you all, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.